AMENDED CLAIM SET:

1. (currently amended) A method for inhibiting degradation of brain natriuretic peptide (BNP) in a specimen, which comprises:

obtaining a blood specimen containing brain natriuretic peptide from a subject; ~~and~~

collecting the specimen containing brain natriuretic peptide into a container, wherein a face of the container coming into contact with the specimen is made of or coated with a material selected from the group consisting of silicone and plastics and wherein no aprotinin is added to the specimen; and

permitting the specimen to stand in the container for at least 24 hours at 25°C,

by which the ratio of residual BNP immunoreactivity is 50% or more after 24 hours standing at 25°C.

2. (cancelled).

3. (previously presented) The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said specimen is obtained from a human, dog, pig, rat or mouse.

4. (cancelled).

5. (cancelled).

6. (currently amended) A method for measuring mammalian brain natriuretic peptides in a specimen after standing 24 hours at 25°C, which comprises

obtaining a blood specimen containing brain natriuretic peptide from a subject;

collecting the specimen containing brain natriuretic peptides into a container, wherein a face of the container coming into contact with the specimen is made of or coated with a material selected from the group consisting of silicone and plastics and wherein no aprotinin is added to the specimen;

permitting the specimen to stand in the container for at least 24 hours at 25°C; and

measuring the mammalian natriuretic peptides by standard means,

wherein the ratio of residual BNP immunoreactivity is 50% or more after 24 hours standing at 25°C.

7. - 11. (cancelled).

12. (currently amended) A method for inhibiting degradation of brain natriuretic peptide (BNP) in whole blood or blood plasma, which comprises:

obtaining a blood specimen containing brain natriuretic peptide from a subject; ~~and~~

collecting the whole blood or blood plasma into a container, wherein a face of the container coming into contact with the whole blood or blood plasma is made of or coated with a material selected from the group consisting of silicone and plastics and wherein no aprotinin is added to the specimen; and

permitting the specimen to stand in the container for at least 24 hours at 25°C,

by which the ratio of residual BNP immunoreactivity is 50% or more after 24 hours standing at 25°C.

13. (currently amended) A method for inhibiting an activation of a substance degrading brain natriuretic peptide (BNP) in a specimen, which comprises:

obtaining a blood specimen containing brain natriuretic peptide from a subject; and

collecting the specimen containing brain natriuretic peptide into a container, wherein a face of the container coming into contact with the specimen is made of or coated with a material selected from the group consisting of silicone and plastics and wherein no aprotinin is added to the specimen; and

permitting the specimen to stand in the container for at least 24 hours at 25°C,

by which the ratio of residual BNP immunoreactivity is 50% or more after 24 hours standing at 25°C.

14. (previously presented) The method as claimed in claim 6, wherein said specimen is obtained from a human, dog, pig, rat or mouse.

15. (previously presented) The method as claimed in claim 12, wherein said specimen is obtained from a human, dog, pig, rat or mouse.

16. (previously presented) The method as claimed in claim 13, wherein said specimen is obtained from a human, dog, pig, rat or mouse.

17. – 20. (cancelled).

21. (new) A method for inhibiting degradation of brain natriuretic peptide (BNP) in a specimen, which comprises:

obtaining a blood specimen containing brain natriuretic peptide from a subject; and

collecting the specimen containing brain natriuretic peptide into a container, wherein a face of the container coming into contact with the specimen is coated with silicone and wherein no aprotinin is added to the specimen,

by which the ratio of residual BNP immunoreactivity is 50% or more after 24 hours standing at 25°C.

22. (new) A method for measuring mammalian brain natriuretic peptides in a specimen, which comprises:

obtaining a blood specimen containing brain natriuretic peptide from a subject; and

collecting the specimen containing brain natriuretic peptide into a container, wherein a face of the container coming into contact with the specimen is coated with silicone and wherein no aprotinin is added to the specimen,

by which the ratio of residual BNP immunoreactivity is 50% or more after 24 hours standing at 25°C.

23. (new) A method for inhibiting degradation of brain natriuretic peptide (BNP) in whole blood or blood plasma, which comprises:

obtaining a blood specimen containing brain natriuretic peptide from a subject; and

collecting the specimen containing brain natriuretic peptide into a container, wherein a face of the container coming into contact with the specimen is coated with silicone and wherein no aprotinin is added to the specimen,

by which the ratio of residual BNP immunoreactivity is 50% or more after 24 hours standing at 25°C.

24. (new) A method for inhibiting an activation of a substance degrading brain natriuretic peptide (BNP) in a specimen, which comprises:

obtaining a blood specimen containing brain natriuretic peptide from a subject; and

collecting the specimen containing brain natriuretic peptide into a container, wherein a face of the container coming into contact with the specimen is coated with silicone and wherein no aprotinin is added to the specimen,

by which the ratio of residual BNP immunoreactivity is 50% or more after 24 hours standing at 25°C.